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UNCLAS COLOMBO 001503

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

RSO FOR DS/IP/ITA AND DS/IP/SA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: HOLLYWOOD BUDDHA PROTEST AT EMBASSY COLOMBO

1. (SBU) Summary - On Saturday, September 11, at approximately 1235 hours local time, a group of approximately 70 Sri Lankan nationals, five of whom were Buddhist monks, staged a peaceful demonstration outside the North Gate of U.S. Embassy Colombo to protest the release of the American film "Hollywood Buddha." The group requested to present a letter to the U.S. Embassy but refused to enter the Embassy Inspection Room at North Gate, therefore the letter was not delivered. The group disbanded at approximately 1323 hours without incident. Police support was excellent. A similar, larger demonstration is expected Monday, September 13. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Details - On Friday afternoon, September 10, at approximately 1600 hours, RSO Colombo received information from the Sri Lankan Directorate of Internal Intelligence (DII) that a demonstration would be staged on Saturday in front of the U.S. Embassy by the National Patriotic Movement, an umbrella organization of the right-wing Senhalese JVP party. The purpose of the demonstration was to protest the release of a U.S. film entitled "Hollywood Buddha." RSO coordinated notification of Embassy community, Embassy security elements, and local police. POL contacted JVP Saturday morning to verify the information and was advised that no demonstration was planned. RSO/FSNI was later advised by DII that the JVP, now in alliance with President Kumaratunga's party, was attempting to distance itself from a protest against U.S. interests and therefore denied any affiliation with the demonstration. It is unclear at this point if JVP was in fact connected to the demonstration. On Saturday morning, September 11, MSG's were reacted prior to the scheduled demonstration and monitored events from react positions inside the Chancery. At approximately 1235 hours, a group of about 70 Sri Lankans, five of whom were Buddhist monks dressed in traditional orange sarongs, began to assemble outside the Embassy's North Gate carrying signs written in Senhalese that protested the release of an American film, "Hollywood Buddha," claiming the film was an insult to Buddha. Some signs indicated an affiliation with the National Buddhist Heritage (NFI). A significant media presence was at the scene as well. At approximately 1300 hours, the LGF supervisor advised RSO that the demonstrators had requested to deliver a letter to the Embassy. RSO, being the only American officer present at the Embassy, responded to the Inspection Room at North Gate to receive the letter. Three members of the protest group were invited inside the Inspection Room to deliver the letter, but they refused, insisting the RSO walk outside the gate and into the crowd to receive the letter. The RSO declined and returned to the Chancery without receiving the letter. At approximately 1323 hours, the demonstrators disbanded peacefully without incident. Police support and DII intelligence support was excellent throughout the event.

3. (SBU) After the demonstration ended, DII notified RSO that a larger demonstration of similar theme was scheduled for Monday, September 13 at 1200. RSO will implement appropriate security arrangements to include restriction of all traffic entering and exiting the Embassy during the prescribed period.
ENTWISTLE